

## Information on Pertussis (Whooping Cough)



**What is Pertussis?** A highly contagious respiratory disease caused by bacteria found in the nose and throat.

**What are the symptoms of Pertussis?** It usually begins with *cold-like* symptoms including sneezing, runny nose, a mild, occasional cough and low-grade fever. Then the cough becomes more severe. Often a person has attacks or spasms of coughing. The coughing may cause a person to vomit, cough up mucous, or lose his/her breath. Coughing may continue for weeks or months. Uncommonly a child may make a crowing sound (whoop) when she/he draws a breath after severely coughing. Teens and adults usually have milder disease.

**How is Pertussis spread?** Through the air by coughing or sneezing, sharing food, sharing eating utensils during a meal, or kissing.

**Who can get Pertussis?** People of all ages. If a person has had pertussis before, they almost always are protected for life.

**Can a person get Pertussis even if they have been immunized?** Yes. The vaccine protects about 80% of fully vaccinated people. Because the protection given by vaccine generally lasts fewer than 12 years, fully immunized children are well protected, but most older teens and adults have little or no immunity. The vaccine is not given after the seventh birthday due to the increased frequency of side effects in people over age 7.

**How soon after infection do symptoms occur?** From 7-21 days, usually 7-10 days.

**How long is someone contagious?** From the time cold-like symptoms or cough begins until three weeks after the attacks of coughing started. When an infected person is treated with an effective antibiotic (e.g. Erythromycin), they are no longer contagious after taking the antibiotic for five days.

**How long should a person with Pertussis stay isolated at home?** Infected persons who are not treated should stay home for three weeks after the attacks of coughing started. Infected persons who are treated may return to day care, work, or school after completing five days of antibiotic. **It is very important that they take all the antibiotic that has been prescribed.**

**What should be done to protect people who have been exposed?**

- Anyone exposed to pertussis that has cold-like symptoms or a cough should be promptly examined and tested by a physician.
- The health department recommends that household contacts and close contacts exposed to pertussis should take an effective antibiotic for the prescribed time.
- Those under age 7 exposed to pertussis should have their record of DTP or DTaP immunizations evaluated by a nurse or doctor. It may be recommended that some children receive a dose of DTP or DTaP vaccine.

**What can be done to prevent Pertussis?** Vaccination is the most effective prevention. The series of 5 diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTP or DTaP) immunizations begins at age 2 months. Also, people should cover their mouth when coughing or sneezing, use disposable tissues, and wash their hands often.

*If you have questions, please call your doctor or local health department.*

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